

Standards Committee Annual Report 2024/2025

Foreword from the Chair of the Standards Committee – *to be completed prior to submission to Council.*

The Annual Report outlines the work of the Standards Committee during the municipal year 2024/2025 and covers the following subjects:

- 1 Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee
- 2 Complaints
- 3 Independent Persons
- 4 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints
- 5 Sexual Harassment Legislation
- 6 Code of Conduct on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers
- 7 Consultation on Virtual Attendance of Members at Meetings
- 8 Code of Corporate Governance
- 9 Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England
- 10 Applications for Dispensations
- 11 Gifts and Hospitality
- 12 Training
- 13 Policy and Constitution Review Work

Appendix A - Annual Report of the Independent Persons

1 Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee

- 1.1 At the Annual Council meeting in May 2024, Councillor Kevin Gillott was appointed as the Chair of Standards Committee, with Councillor Helen Wetherall appointed as Vice Chair.

2. Complaints

- 2.1 No complaints regarding District Councillors were received during 2024/25.
- 2.2 No complaints regarding Parish Councillors were investigated during 2024/25.
- 2.3 The Committee considered new guidance that had been drawn up by the Monitoring Officer for those wishing to make a complaint. The guidance set out what details should be provided when alleging that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct.

3. Independent Persons

- 3.1 At Council in September 2024, the three current Independent Persons were all reappointed until the end of May 2027.
- 3.2 The Council's Independent Persons are:
- Amanda Orchard
- David Richardson
- Graham Hudson

4. Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

- 4.1 The Council received its Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) on 17 July 2024. It contained information on how many complaints and enquiries had been referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and how many complaints were upheld or referred back for local resolution.
- 4.2 There were 14 complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO. Of these 14, three complaints had been upheld, three complaints had been referred back for local resolution, one complaint had not been upheld and seven complaints had been closed after initial enquiries.

5. New Sexual Harassment Legislation

- 5.1 The Committee considered the implications of The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which placed a duty on all employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their employees in the workplace.

6. Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers

- 6.1 The Standards Committee considered the new Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers, which had been published in June 2024 by Solace, CIPFA and the LLG.

7. Consultation on Virtual Attendance of Members at Meetings

- 7.1 The Standards Committee considered and recommended to Council a response to the Government consultation on virtual attendance of Members at meetings and on the use of proxy votes.

8. Code of Corporate Governance

- 8.1 As it does on an annual basis, the Committee considered the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

9. Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England

- 9.1 The Committee considered the Government consultation on strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England.
- 9.2 Several issues were highlighted, including the expected stringency of the new framework, the level of sanction powers that Local Authorities should have, the role of Independent Persons, the relationship between District Councils and Parish/Town Councils, and the level of clarity required in any new framework.

10. Applications for Dispensations

- 10.1 The Committee considered a number of applications for dispensations to participate in meetings where Councillors had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

11. Gifts and Hospitality

- 11.1 The annual report detailing all entries on the Council's Gifts and Hospitality Register during 2024 was considered.

12. Training

- 12.1 The Committee considered the attendance by Councillors at training sessions held during the year.
- 12.2 The Committee considered what training could be offered to Members during 2025/26.

13. Policy and Constitution Review Work

- 13.1 The Standards Committee had undertaken its duty to carry out a review of the Constitution. During the previous two years the Committee's review of the Constitution had been an in-depth review making some significant changes, therefore only a light touch review had been required in 2024/25. Areas reviewed included:
- Delegations Scheme
 - Contract Procedure Rules
 - Planning Committee Terms of Reference
 - Council Procedure Rules
 - Committee Terms of Reference
- 13.2 The Committee considered the annual review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.
- 13.3 The Committee considered the annual review of the RIPA Policy.

Appendix A - Annual Report of the Independent Persons

To be completed